

Winter Edition: February 2022

# The Voice

**A letter from our Executive Director**



Hello Friends of the MHA,

We are excited to let everyone know about a new piece of programming we're launching at the MHA.

The MHA, in collaboration with Mental Health Advocates of Western New York, is pleased to announce that they will be offering **Youth Peer Support Services** to middle and high school students in Niagara County.

The agencies will be working with Niagara County School Districts to conduct presentations in classroom settings on subjects related to mental health, as well as provide Youth Peer staff for additional one-on-one support to students who may need, or want, additional support to help them better identify, manage, and recover from mental health issues they may be dealing with.

We're really able to leverage the expertise of both agencies to benefit the students of Niagara County. The Community Education piece provided by the MHA in Niagara County and the Youth Peer Services provided by the Mental Health Advocates of WNY.

If you would like to learn more about this program, or if you work for a school district and want to schedule a presentation, please call me at 716-433-3780.

Funding for this initiative is generously provided through a grant from the Grigg Lewis Foundation, a private foundation established in 1968 through a gift by Henrietta Grigg Lewis, and whose areas of interest include Arts & Culture, Community Improvements, Education, Elderly, Health & Wellness, History/Preservation/Tourism, Human Service, and Youth, with a heavy focus on benefitting the residents of Eastern Niagara County.

Daniel Colpoys  
Executive Director



“A life that touches others goes on forever.” -Unknown

MHA's Compeer Niagara Program lost a great friend and supporter recently, Eric Arendas, a long-time Compeer Niagara Volunteer passed away December 28th, 2021. Eric lived with mental illness and always did his best to live a great life and help others to live a great life through his self-less volunteerism.



In a recent text I was able to share with Eric who I believe he is, “You are Eric. You are a man who puts in effort to be what you think is the best version of yourself and you are learning to give yourself grace. You are loyal. You are kind. You are loving. You love football. You are a cat person. You are a tattoo guy. You are genuine. You are defined by your character, and you have good character. You have humor. You are my friend.”

Eric continues to show me that friendship has no limits, even when we are in different areas of the universe. Eric's wonderful family encouraged donations to Compeer Niagara in his honor. Along with thanking Eric's family, we would like to thank everyone who donated in his memory. Eric will go on forever as his life continues to touch others.

-Tara Porter, Compeer Niagara

### **LGBTQ+ Support Group Run By a True Peer- Come Join Us!**

Did you know that the MHA's LGBTQ support group is run by someone who is not just by a NYS Certified Peer Specialist, but pansexual and a transman as well?

I know I don't at all look the part of transman- I'm feminine presenting for a number of reasons I won't get into here – and that throws some people off. It threw off the members of a very toxic support group I attended a decade ago when I first took this identity and lived this way for two years. They were stuck on stereotypes. They couldn't see how I could be a man if I wasn't all about beer and NASCAR and working on trucks and womanizing and hunting and... you get the picture. They wanted to define me instead of letting me create myself. And they couldn't accept that I didn't feel safe physically transitioning because I was the sole breadwinner in the house and responsible for taking care of my family. They thus called me “fail male.”

Hurt, I gave up and went to agendered for a number of years, until my people E & P wisened me up and told me it was ok to be myself. So as of this week I'm back to being the authentic me, and coming out again. There is no term for someone like me- someone who is psychologically a guy but has no real hatred for their female form and doesn't intend to change much at this point in time. I was searching for a term until P again schooled me, saying that such was debated in the trans community years ago and it was agreed that no term was needed, as people like me are no different than anyone else and no less trans (and a separate term would institute that division). Apparently you don't have to have a high degree of dysphoria and self-hatred of your current form; trans can simply be a thing of love instead. That was so empowering to hear!

I share this story not to focus on myself, but to show you that there is no right or wrong way to be LGBTQ+, and you don't need to fit any stereotype to be “right” in who you are with us. We are a safe place and welcoming to everyone. Come be with people who “get it!” We talk about topics such as how we know who we are, terminology, mental health, coming out and safety, relationship concerns, spirituality, LGBTQ+ in different cultures, and so much more. Join us!

# Meet our new hires!

## **Gloria Ferraro, Community Education and Referral Assistant**

I started working for the Mental Health Association in November 2021. I'm happy to be here working with the team. I've lived in Niagara County for about 43 years with 29 of those years being right here in Lockport. I have personal experiences with mental health, so when the opportunity came up to work here, I thought it would be a good fit. My husband and I have raised three boys, are new empty nesters, and have three adorable grandchildren. I'm looking forward to being of service to people here in Niagara County.



## **Melissa McQuiston, NFMCC NYS Certified Peer Specialist**

I am brand new to the MHA. I have four years sober, and am continuing to work on overcoming anxiety. A cool fact about me is that I hand feed a wild deer I named Whiskers. I love to help people. I am very excited to share my unique history to help people with their struggles.



## **Kevin Berta, NFMCC NYS Certified Peer Specialist**

I have been in the human services field for 15 years, in particular working with the developmentally disabled population. I have been a Behavior Technician, Senior Day Supervisor, and Behavior Consultant. I am married with three children. My experience with the MHA has been great so far. I look forward to using my own experiences in life to help people see the light during their struggles, along with learning more about mental health.



## **Mike Chille, Trott Center Peer Wellness Coach**

I'm 30 years old and have been with the Mental Health Association for about 3 months now. I love music, the outdoors, birding, and tabletop games. I'm looking forward to starting my family with my partner with the birth of our son in May of this year, I'm very excited to become a father. I've worked in many different fields and look forward to continuing to make a difference in people's lives through working with the MHA.



## **Tammy Lance, Recovery Line Peer Specialist**

I have a daughter and a grandson who live with me. I love spending time with my daughter and my grandson who's now five years old. We have family movie night once a week. I also enjoy walking my little dog Oliver at the park. I am new to Hope House, but I truly enjoy working there. I look forward to working with MHA, and furthering my education in becoming a Certified Peer Specialist.



**Dan Colpoys**  
Executive Director  
ext. 310

**Mary Ann Bucolo**  
Finance/HR Director  
ext. 302

**Crystal Hites**  
Peer Activities Director  
ext. 311

**Vacant**  
Compeer Niagara  
Director  
ext. 307

**Sara Arndt**  
In-Home Respite  
Coordinator  
ext. 313

**Rhiannon O'Shea**  
Community Education &  
Referral Coordinator  
ext. 309

**Program Assistants**  
MHA Main Desk  
ext. 301

## Rotary Club of Lockport

The Mental Health Association in Niagara County is excited to announce our membership in the Rotary Club of Lockport. Our agency is represented by our Executive Director, Dan Colpoys, and our Community Education and Referral Coordinator, Rhiannon O'Shea.

The Rotary Club of Lockport is dedicated to community service throughout the county. You may have seen some of their members at different locations during the holiday season, raising money for the Salvation Army through the bell-ringing bucket collection.

Check out our Instagram and Facebook pages to keep up to date with events the Rotary Club may be hosting. Upcoming is their "Tips and Sips for Water" fundraiser at the Davison Road Inn on February 8<sup>th</sup>. The proceeds will go to efforts to provide water purification to the people in Kenya.

## Social Media

Do you like us on Facebook, or follow us on Instagram? If not, you're missing out on some great information and content!

The MHA's Community Education Department has been working hard to create a new identity online. Check in every weekday for the topic of the day, where you can learn more about mental health diagnoses, resources in the community, and fun facts related to mental health. Stay connected with us to stay up to date on agency happenings and to keep informed on mental health related topics. Find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/MHANIagara> and on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/mhaniagaracounty/>!

## A message from the host of

### Lockport TV, Joanna Torreano:

Are you or someone you love having surgery? Have you thought about how you would feel waking up in ICU?

My journey started with an annual well visit with my primary doctor. An appointment I wasn't going to keep because I felt fine. That visit started a snowball where I ended up in a hospital.

My book takes you through all the steps that happened before, during and after the hospital. Each chapter ends with a lesson I learned. Written From the Heart is available on Amazon.

Written From The Heart

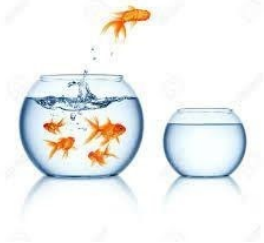


My Journey From Hospital to Healing with Practical Advice

Joanna Montagna Torreano



## Mental Wellness Starts With Friendship



As many of you know, I will no longer hold the position of Compeer Niagara Director. I want each of you to know that my time with Compeer Niagara has been truly life changing. I have learned so much about myself and my community all thanks to you. I know that I am a better person from my time here at Compeer Niagara. This program has allowed me to understand the true importance of friendship and fun. I could share hundreds of examples, but I'll save those for now. Instead, I just want to say THANK YOU!!

Even though I won't be in the office every day- this isn't goodbye. I will be staying on as a volunteer so you'll still see me at events and I'll be staying on to help the next team transition into Compeer Niagara. We aren't sure who that is yet, but once it is decided we will be sure to let everyone know. In the meantime, you can continue to use MHA resources, like calling the warm line, connecting with Rhiannon in Community Education, talking and visiting with our front desk staff, contacting Executive Director Dan, joining Crystal with support groups, stopping into the office to use the library... whatever you need. For my Compeer Niagara Kiddos- KEEP USING THE COUCH. Also remember to reach out to EACH OTHER. Change is good, but it can also be scary, I know I'm feeling all sorts of things, so connecting with each other is a tool I will be using.

Thank you for being a part of something that allows my soul to shine, allowed me to connect to my roots, include my family, and positively impact my community. Thank you for making sure I "don't forget to be awesome".

I hope that my staying on as a volunteer shows the true importance and magic of this invaluable program- please join me in volunteering!! Using friendship and fun to better the world, who else can say that?!

#### Ray Clute's Fudge

6 Cups Sugar  
 1 Cup Cocoa  
 1 Can Evaporated Milk (add enough 2% Milk to make 4 Cups)  
 ¼ tsp. Salt  
 1 tbsp. Peanut Butter  
 ¼ lb. Butter  
 2 tsp. Vanilla  
 1 lb. Walnuts



- Mix sugar, cocoa, and salt in large kettle. Add milk and stir. Bring to a boil stirring constantly. Then stir frequently until fudge has returned to a starting level.
- Check "doneness" by using a small amount in a saucer and stirring it. Check frequently until it hardens .
- Add butter, peanut butter and vanilla.
- Mix with electric mixer until it does not drip from beaters.
- Add nuts.
- Fill greased pan or cupcake tins.

I am sharing my Grampa's Fudge Recipe because it was the reason I became a part of Compeer Niagara. Although I didn't know it until after my grandparents' passing, they were both long time Compeer Niagara volunteers! At one time my Grampa shared his fudge recipe with the group and my Gram was the one to type it. I've had that copy hanging in my office, reminding me every day to be true to myself and my community.

Good Vibes Always,  
 Tara Porter



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The Mission of The Mental Health Association in Niagara County, Inc. is to promote mental wellness by sponsoring and implementing advocacy, education and community service programs.

**Executive Board**

Board President: Emily Shields

Board Vice President: vacant

Secretary: Alix Hutchison

Treasurer: Joel Grundy

**Board Members**

Kristen Braunscheidel

Sarah Mack

Kyle Zunner



United Way of Greater Niagara

The Mental Health Association in Niagara County, Inc. is funded by the New York State Office of Mental Health, the Niagara County Department of Mental Health, the United Way of Greater Niagara, grants, memberships and voluntary contributions.